

What Will a Second Trump Presidency Mean for Taiwan ?

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WHILE THE US presidential election has yet to be formally called, results currently suggest that the winner will be former US president Donald Trump. As such, Taiwan will soon need to contend with the possibility of a second Trump presidency.

Photo Credit : Shealah Craighead/White House/Public Domain

There have largely been two schools of thought in Taiwan about the prospect of a second Trump presidency. The first points to the possibility of significant disruption to strengthening US-Taiwan ties under a Democratic presidential administration.

Namely, Trump was originally seen as an ally by many in Taiwan after his willingness to break from decades of diplomatic precedence in 2016 [by taking a phone call](#) as president-elect from then-Taiwanese president Tsai Ing-wen. Trump was seen as opposed to China on Cold Warrior grounds, as a traditional Republican might be seen as.

Nevertheless, perceptions of Trump in Taiwan gradually shifted, particularly because Trump evidenced a highly transactional view of US-Taiwan relations and lashed out at Taiwan on protectionist grounds. Even if the US-China trade war began under Trump, statements by Trump have sometimes evidenced unusually positive views of Chinese president Xi Jinping. Such statements have sometimes raised the dangerous possibility of Trump [trading off](#) Taiwan to China to secure favorable terms on a trade deal. Other comments by Trump have denigrated [Taiwan's size in comparison](#) to China or [lashed out](#) at Taiwan with the accusation that Taiwan stole the semiconductor industry from the US. As such, Trump has come to be seen as dangerous for Taiwan.

The second school of thought, however, suggests that there was no fundamental disruption to US policy under the first Trump administration and that despite inflammatory rhetoric by Trump, the Trump administration's policy was still largely within expectations. The argument is that the second Trump administration will prove similar, even if the Biden administration was seen as having continued policies intended to take a harder line to China that began under the Trump administration and brought a more steady hand to it, which a prospective Harris administration was likely to maintain.

It is true that the structural factors that dictate increased tensions between the US and China have not changed, whether under the first Trump administration, the Biden administration, or a second Trump administration. But there are reasons to believe that appointees to a second Trump administration would not be the individuals present in the first Trump administration who were seen as having a moderating impact on its actions. Instead, with Trump suspicious of potential turncoats when many of the key officials in his administration later sought to challenge him, Trump is instead likely to make appointments on the basis of personal loyalty. As seen with leaked plans for what has been referred to [as Project 2025](#), Trump may potentially seek to gut government in order to

strengthen control by his ideological adherents. To this extent, it is possible that there will not be restraining forces within a second Trump administration.



Donald Trump. Photo credit : NATO/Flickr/CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

It is to be seen how the second Trump administration plays out, then. Trump may maintain the current course of action on China, but there is also indeed the danger of Trump throwing Taiwan under the bus to make a deal with China. Whether with [Ukraine](#) or [Taiwan](#), Trump has suggested that through personal intervention—and his strong personal relationship with Xi and Putin—that there will be no conflict that breaks out. But such statements do, in fact, suggest that dealmaking on the basis of personal ties would take place. And, in line with the protectionist sentiments of Trump's base that propelled him to victory, Trump is expected to continue to lash out at traditional allies of the US in the Asia Pacific with the accusation that they are freeloaders on defense, whether this be Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, or the Philippines.

If Taiwanese politicians are able to flatter or placate Trump, perhaps not unlike how the now-deceased Shinzo Abe was [able to manage](#) Japan's relationship vis-a-vis the US and Trump on the basis of personal ties when Trump, perhaps Taiwan would be able to maintain relations with the US under Trump. But with Taiwan having hewed politically progressive in past years, such as ties would always face the danger of MAGA Republicans who back Trump unpredictably turning on Taiwan on the basis of its domestic social stances.

Otherwise, Trump may hope for actions in line with the optics of bringing jobs and manufacturing in critical industries such as the semiconductor industry back to the US. In this sense, [TSMC's fab in Arizona](#) and similar projects may take on greater significance for Taiwan.

Unpredictable times are ahead for Taiwan, in this sense. Taiwan has long been subject to the often mercurial winds of American politics and the second coming of Trump proves no examples. That the election result of a single country proves so impactful on Taiwan again gestures toward the enormous power that America has had over Taiwan exclusively, whether as its security guarantor in contemporary times, or its backing of domestic autocrats such as the KMT and Chiang regime during authoritarian times. Taiwan again finds itself far from the master of its own fate, now subject to the imperial whims of the second Trump presidency.

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• New Bloom. 6 November 2024 :
<https://newbloommag.net/2024/11/06/trump-taiwan-second-presidency/>

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